



On December 2003 the president of the republic, Carlo Azelio Ciampi, conferred the Civil Gold Medal on San Pietro and in April 2008 the president of the republic Giorgio Napolitano granted the old inhabited Centre of San Pietro National Monument status. The principal works which followed were the reinstatement of San Nicola square and the Municipal square, the identification and the reinstatement of the pathways which link the west Vallone grotto to the village, the continuing periodic clearance of vegetation from the ruins, the creation of a botanical garden dedicated to native aromatic spices managed by the Aquilonia association and the creation of a museum and visitor centre in the old Comparelli olive mill in which was discovered the old San Nicola church of which all trace had been lost.

The old centre with its ruins, the church of St Michael the Archangel, its stone ramparts and medieval towers, the church dedicated to St. Sebastian and with its stone paved streets is in reality an open air museum which in recent years has adopted a new role, that of encouraging the growth of a martyred populous and projecting them towards a new socio/economic development whilst still preserving its identity as a witness to historic events. Many residents were forced to emigrate to faraway and unknown lands, called to by the so called "Act of Recall" by fellow villagers who were emigrants from the end of the previous century, especially to the U.S.A. And Canada. For San Pietro the emigration phenomenon was, perhaps, a harder blow than that of her destruction in that it brought about a definitive disappearance of the labour force which was necessary for her reconstruction. Entire family groups abandoned San Pietro to seek their fortune elsewhere.

One can, today, with pride affirm that those who remained and those who left have always demonstrated a great will to begin again. More than seventy years have passed and memories of the war have weakened but not disappeared, and this is why; new generations have always manifested an interest in getting to know the history of their village and solicited the star of concrete action to revitalise the old inhabited centre. The current administration did not remain insensible and as well as taking up preceding initiatives became active in efforts to recover the site and putting in place promotional initiatives. Among others they established San Pietro as part of the "Memorial Park of the Terra di Lavoro" which was designed by the Campania Region in memory of the destruction and massacres which the population suffered under the Nazis during the second world war. The regional council for Campania with its resolution No. 2311 of the 18th Dec. 2004 approved a bill to institute the "Memorial Park of the Terra di Lavoro". This initiative is still ongoing but San Pietro Infine has gone ahead believing in the idea and thanks to local politics has given birth to their own "Parco della Memoria Storica" whilst not excluding the possibility of coordinating with other towns in the Campania Region.

Prior to starting any activity or works which impinge on the old inhabited centre meetings have always been organised with scholars and experts who have shared their thoughts on the proposals whilst rigorously maintaining preservation of the sites and limiting works in the areas close to habitation appropriate to the creation of necessary infrastructure which will render them ever more welcoming to visitors to the park. Today we are working to upgrade an area to the south of the inhabited area with the restoration of a structure which will become a guest house. Programmed are the following: the restoration of the St Michael the Archangel church, new toilet services for visitors and the installation of a video surveillance system. All in all we still live with the memory of the years before 2001 when all was overgrown by vegetation, abandoned and singularly degraded.

Witness to this is found in book entitled "San Pietro Infine, Ricerche Storiche e Artistiche" by Angelo Pantoni, published in 2006 by Montecassino.

Brambles, uprooted and fallen trees, abandoned electrical appliances, crumbling shacks and scrub of every description had taken over the ruins provoking collapse and irreversible damage.

Everyone recalls the abandoned state of the church of St. Michael which had become a shelter for sheep and the Comparelli olive oil mill in San Nicola square which was destined to become a stable or little more, all of which was legally permitted.

Fortunately a new door opened, that of redevelopment and conservation, otherwise all, within a few years would have been lost.

The idea of 'not touching' is inappropriate and damaging whilst it is certainly more appropriate and effective to 'touch and touch well'.

If you consider that the excavations of Pompei or any other national monument without consolidation, restoration, renewal, maintenance etc. etc. would they be visible today?. What destiny would have had the Palazzo Comparelli without some intervention and consolidation?

Collapse.

Thanks to some of our citizens this palazzo, which was the home of Antonio Alfieri D'Evandro and then the Comparelli family is, today safe.

The program to recover old San Pietro was hard but not impossible.

The creation of the museum and visitors centre within the park is the proof that one can intervene and with, according to those who have visited, excellent results.

Certain inhabitants would never have imagined one day a museum in San Pietro and yet it is a reality, not only that but it has been recognised as a Campania Regional Museum.

The visitors centre is decorated internally with scenes by Carlo Rambaldi (author of ET and King Kong) organised to witness both the drama suffered by the inhabitants during the war and also to communicate the story of San Pietro to those who are visiting by the use of sounds and sensations.

It was intended to create a dynamic museum in which by following a prepared route one could relive history and the successive vicissitudes which befell San Pietro from the year one thousand until Dec. 1943 and after. A large part of the projected images were taken from the film by J.Huston "The Battle of San Pietro" (1944), recognised by cinema critics as the greatest documentary ever filmed of the war and which includes images of the villagers exiting from the caves after the liberation. The same film inspired the director Steven Spielberg to make his film "Saving Private Ryan". The music group "U2" chose images from the film for their videoclip "In God's Country".

In 1959 the film director Mario Moncinelli came to San Pietro to film some scenes for his "The Great War" with Alberto Sordi and Vittorio Gassman.

San Pietro, an extraordinary witness to history, has been called by many "The Pompei of the 20th century".

The author Rick Atkinson, winner of the 2003 Pulitzer prize for his book "The Day of Battle" having visited our "Parco della Memoria" said of San Pietro "This spot on the map, forgotten by God was at one time the most famous place in Europe" (from the journal "La Repubblica" 1st Jan. 2007 and the New York Times of the 30th Sept. 2007)

Paulo Vacca
Architect.